Associated Press

Former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison kisses wife after victory.

Garrison, Prober of JFK Death, Elected to the Louisiana Bench

-7/24/78

By John Pope
Special to The Washington Post

NEW ORLEANS—Jim Garrison, who drew national attention with his investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy, won a seat on a state appeals court in a runoff election Saturday that attracted about one-fourth of New Orleans' registered voters.

Garrison, who served three terms as New Orleans district attorney, defeated New Orleans lawyer Denis A. Barry by 34,157 votes (53.3 percent) to 29,717 votes (46.7 percent), according to unofficial returns.

Garrison, who had lost a bid for a fourth term as district attorney and two subsequent races for the state Supreme Court, had been in private practice since leaving the district attorney's office in 1973.

However, after Saturday's victory, he said, "Rumors of my (political) death were greatly exaggerated . . . I knew I was right for the job and the job was right for me. I never had a moment's doubt."

Garrison will take the seat on the nine-member Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal that Ernest N. Morial vacated last year to become New Orleans' mayor.

Garrison became best known for his controversial, two-year investigation in the late 1960s into what he claimed was a conspiracy hatched here to assassinate President Kennedy.

He accused New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw of working in that conspiracy and brought him to trial. However, after a two-week trial, Shaw was acquitted. He has since died, and his suit charging Garison with harassment is being continued by the Shaw estate.

Garrison also came to public attention when he was indicted on federal bribery charges but later acquitted.

In the first primary for the appeals judgeship April 15, Garrison led a five-man field, with 23,671 votes to Barry's 15,508.

Garrison estimated that he spent just under $40,000 on his race. Barry said his campaign bill should run slightly more than $100,000.

Garrison stressed his years of public service and pointed out that Barry never had held a public office. He also said that the high amount of money Barry put into his race could set a "dangerous precedent" for future judgeship races.

Barry argued that Garrison was unqualified for the job because he was a criminal attorney and it is a civil judgeship. He used the slogan: "A judge should have character, not be one."